



DNI Clapper Op-Ed in The Wall Street Journal - How 9/11 Transformed the Intelligence Community

How 9/11 Transformed the Intelligence Community

It's no longer about 'need to know.' Our guiding principle is 'responsibility to share.'

By James R. Clapper

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It has been a decade since our nation suffered the greatest strategic surprise on American soil since the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the aftermath of September 11, as the country sought to understand how such a complex attack could go undetected, much attention was focused on the intelligence community. Pundits, scholars, commentators and others quickly labeled 9/11 an intelligence failure.

Some suggested that on 9/11 the intelligence community was still operating in a Cold War mindset with too much of its attention and resources focused on threats from nation-states. Others argued that intelligence agencies were resistant to change and unwilling to work together. The belief that intelligence agencies failed to link critical fragments of information that could have revealed al Qaeda's plot, and prevented the attacks, began to take hold.

The criticisms hit the intelligence community hard. Piecing together shards of information to gain a better understanding of our adversaries' capabilities and intentions is a mission-critical function of the intelligence community, and a core competency of intelligence professionals. Prior to the 9/11 attacks, the community had recognized that reorganization, integration of intelligence activities, and a shift in intelligence culture was necessary to adapt to evolving threats. But progress on these initiatives came slowly - too slowly to impact the events of 9/11.

The intelligence community got the message.

Ten years later, we have made great strides in addressing the shortfalls that plagued us that tragic day. We now collaborate on intelligence collection and analysis in ways that were unheard of 10 years ago. We've made significant progress in reducing the cultural, information technology and policy barriers to sharing information among agencies, and we continue to explore new strategies for integrating our intelligence efforts.

We no longer operate largely on the principle of compartmentalization, that is, sharing information based on "need to know." We now start from the imperative of "responsibility to share," in order to collaborate with and better support our intelligence consumers - from the White House to the foxhole.



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The operation against Osama bin Laden on May 1 was enabled by the focused, coordinated efforts of multiple elements of the intelligence community. And as remarkable as that mission was, it was just the most visible example of numerous successes achieved through a renewed emphasis on the thorough integration of intelligence.

Today's intelligence community is innovative and capable of evolving to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex security environment. We study a range of state and nonstate threats - to our own security and interests around the globe, as well as those of our friends and allies. In the realms of counterterrorism and counterintelligence, the demands are great and the stakes are high. Every day, intelligence professionals are aggressively monitoring, preventing and disrupting potential acts of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and cyberwarfare.

Regional issues pose challenges that no single agency can address without collaboration. Consequently, we work as an integrated community to address issues such as how best to understand and respond to opportunities presented by the Arab Spring, how to constructively engage unstable and unpredictable regimes, and how to deal with poverty, poor governance and instability in Africa and South Asia.

So whether confronting al Qaeda affiliates in the Arabian Peninsula or supporting law enforcement efforts against transnational criminal organizations on our southwest border, our intelligence agencies now integrate, coordinate, and aggregate information and capabilities more thoroughly than ever before.

We can't know with absolute certainty if any of these changes would have led to a different outcome on 9/11, but the tangible benefits of vertical and horizontal integration are indisputable. Today we are unquestionably better positioned to provide the kind of full-scope information that leaders need to make informed decisions about how to protect our nation.

The current state of the al Qaeda organization is a striking example of the benefit of intelligence reform and integration. We have vigorously attacked the group's leadership, striving to keep it off balance and cut off from resources. We deny it any sense of security and undermine its ability to plan, train and recruit, and we will continue to apply pressure at every turn until the terrorist organization is incapacitated.

Yet despite significant progress, challenges still remain. Not all of our systems and networks are fully integrated. Differing organizational practices complicate joint efforts, and some bureaucratic impediments remain among the intelligence community's 16 members.



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Moreover, in an era of greater fiscal austerity and limited investment in new programs, we in the intelligence community understand that we must find efficiencies, eliminate duplicative efforts, and focus on the nation's core needs. The hard fact is that we must accomplish these objectives under the constant threat of another terrorist attack. It is a reality that highlights the need for congressional leaders to continue to take great care when considering cuts to national security programs.

The intelligence community exists to provide political and military leaders with the greatest possible decision advantage. We understand, now more than ever, that the best way to accomplish our goal is thorough integration of all national intelligence capabilities. And with the continued support of Congress, we will remain steadfastly focused on our mission. We owe that much to our president, to the American people, and to the family members and victims of 9/11.

Mr. Clapper is the director of National Intelligence.